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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Written statement* submitted by the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 March 2000]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

Rural, indigenous and citizen resistance movements

1. In November 1999, rural trade unionists and militants from non-governmental organizations, drawn from the five continents, held a seminar in Quito (Ecuador) on the subject of rural, indigenous and citizen resistance movements. Together with them, the rural movements grouped within the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movements (FIMARC) bear witness to the fact that, throughout the world, resistance to liberalism is growing and the links between movements are being strengthened so as to enable rural and indigenous populations to speak out about their future and reverse the negative trends of globalization.

2. They firmly denounce the unacceptable practices of transnational corporations which hinder their development and ruin the economies of many countries. By their opposition to the patenting and commercial exploitation of living organisms and by their rejection of genetically modified seeds, they affirm their determination to preserve their food crops and the autonomy of their agricultural activities.

3. The Indian farmers who came to demonstrate in June 1999 in front of the headquarters of Novartis and of Nestlé were welcomed by Swiss farmers. The latter have realized that the human rights violations perpetrated by transnational corporations are yet more glaring and massive in the countries of the South. Thus all have received confirmation of the need to coordinate the struggle from one continent to another and to work together for sustainable development in solidarity.

Access to land, and impunity

4. The agrarian question is an essential issue in all developing countries and, more and more, in each country, it is becoming a political problem. Access to land and the difficulties met with in carrying out genuine agrarian reforms that respect the interests of small farmers are in many countries a source of serious conflict that leads to imprisonment, torture and murder.

5. Each year now 17 April is celebrated as the International Day of Rural Struggle, in commemoration of the massacre on 17 April 1996 in the state of Pará in Brazil of 19 farmers whose only "crime" was to demand a bit of land on which to work and live in dignity.

6. Rural organizations throughout the world have learnt of the scandalous conduct of the trial of three officers in charge of that military police operation against the rural workers of the Landless Movement. Their acquittal aroused the indignation of many popular organizations, both national and international. What is more, the highest authorities in Brazil have expressed their concern over that verdict and the impunity enjoyed by those who committed the massacre.

Armed conflicts are prejudicial to development and human rights

7. Such massacres are on the increase in areas where conflicts have turned into civil war and guerrilla operations detrimental to fundamental freedoms and the essential rights of the human person.

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo the socio-political situation continues to deteriorate because of a permanent state of war. The population is suffering from this situation, which brings with it widespread inflation, police and bureaucratic harassment, a lack of health care, etc.

- Colombia is a country afflicted by civil war for several decades now that is sinking into an unprecedented political, economic and social decline, with violence claiming new victims every day.

- In East Timor, where independence has been bought at a very high price, that of a veritable genocide among the civilian population, the people's will must be respected and all necessary measures must be taken to guarantee peace.

Life before debt repayment

8. Peace, democracy and development go hand in hand. They affect and even determine all the other rights. The reimbursement of external debt and the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are obstacles to the full achievement of economic and social rights. Three-quarters of the most heavily indebted poor countries are to be found in sub-Saharan Africa. Continued demands for the repayment of their debts inevitably lead them to make budget choices that reduce expenditure on health, education and other public services indispensable to the economic and social development of those countries.

Rural workers appeal to the Commission on Human Rights

9. The FIMARC movements wish to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to:

- the need to step up the process of debt forgiveness for the heavily indebted poor countries and to embark on strategies to alleviate the debt of other developing countries;

- the urgency of tackling the rights to education, health, food and development with the same level of resources as is deployed for the other rights;

- the importance of the struggle to be waged by States against impunity, so as to prevent human rights violations (resolution 1999/34);

- the Working Group of the Sub-Commission whose mandate is to identify and examine the effects of the activities of transnational corporations on the enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, including the right to development, the right to a healthy environment and the right to peace.